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AUTHOR	Veenman, Simon; de Laat, Hanneke; Staring, Corine
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ABSTRACT

This study describes the effects of a program designed to train Dutch primary school teachers in skills needed to coach and act as mentors for beginning teachers. The study investigated whether mentors who participated in the training program would implement the target coaching skills and whether the beginning teachers coached by the mentors would perceive a change in mentors' coaching skills. An experimental group included 15 trained mentors and their beginning teachers. A control group included seven untrained mentors and their beginning teachers. The training involved a comprehensive manual and a 2-day workshop. Participants received the manual to study before the workshop. Prior to the training, each mentor conducted an audiotaped coaching conference with a beginning teacher. After the training, trained and untrained mentors again conducted audiotaped coaching conferences with the same beginning teachers. Coaching skills of trained and untrained mentors were rated by expert judges and by the beginning teachers. Beginning teachers also estimated the effects of the coaching on their own practice. Analysis of the judges' observations indicated there was a significant treatment effect for the coaching skills related to the development of autonomy, feedback, and encouragement of self-reflection. Pre- and post-training ratings from the beginning teachers showed no significant treatment effects, as the beginning teachers rated their mentors' coaching skills very favorably at pretest. (Contains 27 references.) (SM)

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Coaching Beginning Teachers

Simon Veenman, Hanneke de Laat and Corine Staring

Department of Educational Sciences
University of Nijmegen
The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the implementation effects of a program for the training of coaching skills with Dutch primary school teachers acting as mentors for beginning teachers are described. Coaching is a form of in-class support intended to provide teachers with feedback on their functioning and thereby stimulate self-reflection and self-analysis to improve instructional effectiveness. Based on the pre- and post-training ratings of coaching conferences, a significant treatment effect was found for the coaching skills concerned with the development of autonomy (empowerment), feedback and encouragement of self-reflection. The pre- and post-training ratings from the beginning teachers themselves showed no significant treatment effects as the beginning teachers rated the coaching skills of their mentors very favourably even at pretest.

Problems of Beginning Teachers

Research has shown that beginning teachers experience the first year of actual teaching as very hectic and generally the most difficult in their career. The transition from teacher training to the first teaching job is often portrayed as traumatic and as a source of disillusionment. In the international literature, this transition is frequently referred to as the "reality shock" (Veenman, 1984). In general, this concept is used to indicate the collapse of the missionary ideals formed during teacher training as a result of the confrontation with the harsh and rude reality of everyday classroom life. One possible explanation for the reality shock is the unrealistic optimism of student teachers during training. Research on learning to teach has shown novice teachers to leave preservice programs and enter the profession believing that "teaching is not that difficult" (Huling-Austin, 1992). When the novice teachers confront the real demands of teaching, this belief can quickly turn into feelings of discouragement.

Another explanation for the reality shock is teacher isolation (Lortie, 1975). In education, unlike other professions, the beginner must not only face the uncertainties inherent in starting a new profession but also all of the responsibilities of an experienced teacher from the first real day of teaching. Opportunities to interact with peers or obtain support and assistance from experienced teachers, however, are often lacking. Two recent studies by the Dutch Educational Inspectorate (Inspectie van het Onderwijs, 1994, 1995) show many beginning primary and secondary school teachers to be simply "thrown into the deep" and left on their own. Most schools have not developed a systematic plan for the induction of beginning teachers. If support is provided, moreover, the beginning teachers must generally ask for it themselves. About one-half of the beginning primary school teachers and two-thirds of the beginning secondary school teachers are not observed teaching and do not receive feedback with regard to their teaching practices from experienced teachers and/or the school principals.

Review of 91 studies from a number of different countries has indeed shown beginning teachers to experience lots of problems and difficulties (Veenman, 1984, 1987). These problems (such as classroom discipline, motivating students, dealing with individual differences, assessing students' work, relations with parents, organization of class work) indicate a clear need for support and assistance. In fact, the pressures encountered during the first years of teaching have been found to discourage many beginning teachers from staying in the profession (Odell & Ferraro, 1992; Colbert & Wolff, 1992).

Teacher Induction

In response to these problems and pressures, a growing number of countries, states and individual schools have established induction programs for the provision of assistance during the first years of teaching (Bolam, 1995; Huling-Austin, 1992; Vonk, 1994). Although beginning teacher induction programs have become more and more prevalent over the years, evaluation of these programs is still in the preliminary stages in most countries. Those evaluations conducted to date, however, have shown improved classroom organisational and management skills, the adoption of more sophisticated instructional strategies, provision of more learning opportunities for pupils, higher student engagement rates and greater self-confidence (Colbert & Wolff, 1991; Schaffer, Stringfield, & Wolfe, 1992). These programs have, moreover, been found to successfully alleviate the difficulties and fears which novice teachers face during their first school year. Examination of induction programs also shows the use of experienced teachers as mentors to be a crucial feature in such programs.

Mentoring

Mentoring entered the vocabulary of teacher education in the early 1980's as part of a broader effort to professionalize teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 1998) and has been used to describe the process of assisting beginning teachers in their career and professional development. That is, experienced teachers serve as mentors in

the induction of beginning teachers. The development of a personal relationship with a colleague who is a novice in the field is a hallmark of mentoring. The development of this personal relationship is built on mutual respect and trust, and certain mentoring skills and characteristics appear to be particularly important for such a relationship: being people-oriented, respectful, warm, caring, sensitive, empathetic, helpful and prepared to share power and expertise. In addition, the mentor must take a personal interest in the career and individual well-being of the novice and be capable of providing support for others (Barnett, 1996; Yeomans & Sampson, 1994).

Reflection is considered the main catalyst for the development of autonomy and expertise on the part of the novice (Furlong & Maynard, 1995; Tomlinson, 1995). The novice's subjective or practical theories about teaching should be taken as the starting point for reflection. Mentoring should be focused on "reflection in action" and "reflection on action" (Schön, 1983, 1990). Nevertheless, a recent study by Dunne and Bennett (1997) indicates that mentors often focus their conferences with student teachers on craft knowledge and that their dialogues are characterised by a lack of challenge and reflection. It is therefore concluded that mentors may need explicit training in the stimulation of novice teachers to reflect on their actions in order to move them to higher levels of professional thinking.

It should be noted that several different concepts of mentoring have been advanced in the literature. Among them are the following: the expert-novice metaphor, the peer-support framework, the concept of counselling, the master-apprentice model and the coaching analogy. As the notion of coaching is adopted as a metaphor for mentoring in the present study, this concept will be considered in greater detail in the following.

Coaching

The coaching is the model most frequently mentioned in the literature on mentoring. Coaching can help teachers improve their instructional effectiveness by providing them with feedback on their functioning and stimulating them to become more reflective. What the teacher actually does in the classroom stands central, and the observational data collected in the classroom constitute the grounds for

subsequent analysis and reflection.

A recent advancement in the field of coaching is the notion of cognitive coaching as developed by Costa and Garmston (1994). The guiding principle behind cognitive coaching is that the instructional behaviours of teachers cannot be influenced until their internal thought processes have been altered. Reflection on teachers' thinking about their classroom practices is considered a means to enhance their teaching expertise and problem solving. According to Costa and Garmston (1994), studies have shown cognitive coaching to positively affect self-confidence, classroom management skills, teaching styles, self-awareness and instructional dialogues with colleagues.

Given the complexity of coaching and improving the reflective capacities of beginning teachers, mentors who want to become cognitive coaches will require assistance. For this purpose, a training program for the development of coaching skills was designed for mentors or experienced primary school teachers. In the program *Coaching Beginning Teachers*, coaching is defined as a form of in-class support for the enhancement of beginning teacher's craftsmanship through systematic reflection on professional practice (cf. Veenman, Visser, & Wijkamp, 1998). The coaching is directed at strengthening the instructional competence of teachers. This implies professional growth and autonomy or what is called empowerment. The coaching cycle (based on pre-conference, observation, and post- conference) and the coaching skills were drawn from the models of clinical supervision and coaching developed by Goldhammer (1969), Cogan (1973), Joyce and Showers (1995), and Costa and Garmston (1994). The following objectives were defined for coaching in our training program: (1) establishment of mutual trust; (2) improvement of instructional practice by providing beginning teachers with feedback and stimulating them to become more reflective and (3) enhancement of beginning teachers' autonomy and self-actualisation by stimulating the development of self-improvement plans.

Following MacLennan (1995), a mentor is defined as an experienced teacher available for the beginning teacher to learn FROM and a coach is defined as an experienced teacher available for the beginning teacher to learn WITH. Mentoring generally precedes coaching. During the stage of mentoring, survival concerns are addressed and the beginning teacher learns what is necessary to function effectively

within the school organization. During the stage of coaching, the professional development of the beginning teacher is addressed. The stage of mentoring gradually runs into the stage of coaching. The content of our training program will be discussed in greater detail below.

Research Questions

In the present study, the effects of a training program on the coaching skills of mentors (i.e, experienced primary school teachers) were examined. The major research questions were: (1) Do the mentors who participated in the training program implement the target coaching skills? (2) Do the beginning teachers coached by those mentors who participated in the training program perceive a change in the coaching skills of the mentors?

Method and Instrumentation

Design

Two different forms of evaluation were undertaken in the present study. First, the coaching skills of trained and untrained mentors were rated by expert judges. Second, the coaching skills of trained and untrained mentors were rated by beginning teachers. Both evaluations were concerned with the degree of implementation of the desired coaching skills by the mentors. In addition, the beginning teachers were asked to estimate the effects of the coaching on their own instructional practice.

Both forms of evaluation were undertaken using an untreated control group design with pretest and posttest. The experimental group consisted of 15 trained mentors and their beginning teachers; the control group consisted of 7 untrained mentors and their beginning teachers.

Subjects

In the spring of 1996, a letter of invitation for participation in a training program devoted to the coaching of mentors was sent by four school advisory centres to the primary schools in their regions. A total of 43 experienced teachers showed an interest in the training program. When the date of the training was announced in the autumn and the prospective mentors were invited to participate, 21 teachers chose not to participate for one or more of the following reasons: the school did not need a new teacher and inconvenient training time schedule. Of the participating 22 mentors, 15 were randomly assigned to the experimental group and 7 to the control group. Both the experimental and control groups consisted of mentors interested in coaching and were thus initially comparable.

The average amount of experience for the mentors in the two groups was about 17 years. Of the entire group of mentors, 10 were women and 12 were men; the associated group of beginning teachers consisted of 18 women and 4 men. The average number of pupils in the classes being taught by the beginning teachers was 25.

The Training Program

The training manual *Coaching Beginning Teachers* consisted of three sections. In section one, the main problems confronting beginning teachers, the tasks of the teacher, the first job, classroom management problems, early concerns about survival and the reality shock are discussed.

In section two, the possible contribution of coaching to improvement of instructional effectiveness and professional development is discussed. The functions of mentoring and coaching are discussed along with the skills needed by the coaches and beginning teachers. The distinction between mentoring and coaching is also clearly made. Mentoring is described as "putting-in" and coaching is described as "pulling-out" (MacLennan, 1995). Input from the mentor is most needed in the early stages of teaching and least needed as the beginning teacher becomes more autonomous. When the beginning teacher becomes more independent, coaching is

used to further enhance the teacher's reflective and problem-solving capacities.

In this same section of the training manual, the different stages in the coaching cycle are also described: pre-conference, observation, and post-conference. The coaching skills for the pre-conference are first discussed and include such skills as trust building, problem definition, problem solving, planning alternatives and the formulation of action plans for improvement. Teacher observation is discussed next and involves making a written record of what is said and done during a class session. Finally, the post-conference coaching skills are discussed. These include probing the teacher's feelings about the lesson, evaluation of the improvement outcomes, discussion of the observational data (reflection and feedback), development of new alternatives and refinement of improvement plans. The mentors are advised to invite the beginning teachers to provide feedback and suggestions for refinements which might make for a more productive coaching relationship.

In section three, the final section of the training manual, some of the problems associated with classroom management are discussed. Some suggestions for dealing with classroom disturbances are also provided.

In the present study, the content of the training manual constituted the basis for two one-day workshops. Prior to this workshop, the manual was sent to the mentors in the treatment group with the request to study at least the sections on pre-conference, observation and post-conference. During the first workshop, the mentors were trained in the skills relevant to pre-conference, observation and post-conference. During the application exercises, the participants formed groups of three and alternated being the coach, the teacher and the observer. After each exercise, the mentors then designed action plans for their own coaching practice. The second workshop was conducted one month after the first workshop to give the mentors the opportunity to further practice their coaching skills. During the second workshop, coaching experiences were exchanged and discussed. Role play exercises were provided to practice skills dealing with possible resistance on the part of the beginning teachers. At the end of the second workshop, the mentors again designed action plans for their own coaching practice. The mentors rated the training manual and workshop very favourably and also indicated that they planned to apply the

newly learned coaching skills in the near future.

Data Collection

Prior to training, the mentors conducted a coaching conference with a beginning teacher. The mentors were asked to conduct this conference in a manner similar to the conferences which they usually perform. This pretest for the experimental and control groups was conducted in January 1997. The workshops for the experimental group then took place in February and March 1997. In April 1997, the trained and untrained mentors were again asked to conduct a coaching conference with the same beginning teachers.

All of the coaching conferences were audiotaped by the mentors, and the tapes were then sent to the expert raters for coding. After each coaching conference, the beginning teachers also rated the coaching skills of their mentors and were asked to estimate the effects of the coaching conference on own their instructional behaviour. The mentors did not have access to the beginning teacher ratings.

The Scale for Coaching Skills

All of the coaching conferences were taped by the mentors. These tapes were then coded by two expert raters using the Scale for Coaching Skills (SCS). The SCS ranges from a score of 1 for no application of the skill to a score of 5 for clear application of the skill. The SCS contains 32 items. The original version of the SCS was developed for a study of the implementation effects of a program for the training of coaching skills with Dutch school counsellors and school principals (Veenman, 1995; Veenman, Visser, & Wijkamp, 1998). The inter-observer reliability checks estimated using analysis of variance (Winer, 1971) were found to range from 0.67 to 1.00 (median 0.97).

Principal components analysis of the SCS scores revealed four factors (or subscales): (1) developing autonomy (14 items, alpha = .96), (2) feedback (7 items, alpha = .97), (3) encouragement of self-reflection (8 items, alpha = .92) and (4)

business-like attitude (3 items, alpha = .78). These four factors were found to account for 75% of the variance in the SCS ratings.

In order for the beginning teachers to evaluate the coaching skills of their mentors, the coached novice teachers used the Teacher Scale for Coaching Skills (TSCS). This scale was derived in part from the SCS but also contains items concerning the use of observational data by the mentor and the perceived effects of the coaching conference on the instructional behaviour of the beginning teacher him/herself. The TSCS contains 32 items. The initial version of this scale was also used in a study evaluating a coaching program for school principals (Veenman, Visser, & Wijkamp, 1998). Principal components analysis of the TSCS scores revealed four factors (or subscales): (1) making concrete improvement plans (12 items, alpha = .91), (2) improvement of instruction through self-reflection (7 items, alpha = .89), (3) empathic stimulation to improve instruction (7 items, alpha = .91) and (4) appreciation of the mentor's coaching skills (6 items, alpha = .81). These four factors were found to account for 74% of the variance in the TSCS ratings. The four TSCS subscales were used at both pretest and posttest. In the posttest, a fifth scale was added, namely "mentor's use of observational data" (7 items, alpha = .77). This scale was only used in the posttest because it was assumed that the trained mentors would only make use of observational data in the complete trained coaching model (including pre-conference, observation and post-conference) at posttest.

A significance level of 5% was used in all of the statistical tests (one-tailed). The mentor and the beginning teacher were the unit of analysis.

Results

A summary of the Scale for Coaching Skills (SCS) for the trained and untrained mentors is presented in Table 1. The data displayed in this table show training to have a marked effect on the coaching skills of the mentors. Significant differences between pretest and posttest for the trained mentors were found for the total SCS and all four subscales: developing autonomy, feedback, encouragement of self-reflection and businesslike attitude (p <.01). One significant pretest versus

posttest difference was found for the untrained mentors, namely for the total SCS ($p < .05$). Significant differences in gain scores for the trained and untrained mentors were found for the total SCS and three subscales: developing autonomy, feedback and encouragement of self-reflection ($p < .01$).

A summary of the TSCS scores for the trained and untrained mentors at pretest and posttest is presented in Table 2. Significant differences between pretest and posttest were found for the trained group on the total TSCS and four subscales: making concrete improvement plans, improvement of instruction through self-reflection, empathic stimulation to improve instruction and appreciation of the mentor's coaching skills ($p < .01$ - $p < .05$). The untrained group also scored higher at posttest than at pretest on the total TSCS and three subscales ($p < .01$); the subscale "appreciation of the mentor's coaching skills" did not reveal significant differences for the untrained group. No significant gain-score differences were found between the trained and untrained mentors. In addition, no differences were found between the trained and untrained mentors for the use of observational data in the provision of feedback at posttest. It should be noted, however, that all of the beginning teachers rated the coaching skills of their mentors quite positively at pretest.

Discussion

The results of the present study suggest that the training program positively affects the coaching skills of mentors. Expert raters rated the trained mentors higher than the untrained mentors on the Scale for Coaching Skills (SCS) than the untrained mentors. Significant differences were found between the trained and untrained mentors on the total SCS and three subscales: developing autonomy, feedback and encouragement of self-reflection. Developing autonomy (or empowerment) refers to strengthening the autonomy of the beginning teachers in order to enable them to reflect on their instructional effectiveness and formulate plans to improve their teaching. Feedback is an important skill, especially for post-conference. Feedback is part of the analysis of the observation and also used to produce self-designed plans for instructional improvement. Feedback encourages

(beginning) teachers to adjust their performance through ".eflection-on-action" and "reflection-in-action" (Schön, 1983). The trained mentors showed better feedback skills than the untrained mentors. Their feedback was more concrete, more specific and limited to a small number of performance problems. Encouragement of reflection refers to activities intended to stimulate self-reflection and subsequent action on the part of the beginning teacher. These activities include asking questions about the beginning teacher's learning experiences, clarifying and probing their responses and empathizing with their accomplishments rather than telling them how to perform. Engaging beginning teachers and mentors in this "reflective dialogue" is meant to help the beginning teacher develop his/her own instructional style. Learning through reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action has been associated with the development of expert thinking and professional expertise (Schön, 1983). With regard to "business-like attitude" or the willingness of both the mentor and beginning teacher to focus on the purpose of the coaching conference -- namely, the development of alternatives for the improvement of instructional effectiveness, both the trained and untrained mentors showed improvement at posttest. This finding most likely explains the absence of significant differences between the trained and untrained groups on this subscale.

The generally positive ratings provided by the coached beginning teachers for the skills of the mentors show these novices to experience coaching as something positive. The above average ratings from the coached beginning teachers also show them to perceive the coaching conferences as improving their instruction. Reflection on instructional practices and the framing of plans for improvement presumably enhance the possibilities for real change as well. Nevertheless, the coached beginning teachers were not found to rate the trained and untrained mentors differently. The above average scores for the TSCS at pretest were difficult to improve, which means that the possibility of a ceiling effect cannot be excluded.

In closing, the effects of a training program directed at the coaching of beginning teachers were found to be positive and thus promising in the present study. The trained mentors put a number of important and desirable coaching skills into practice. Whether these coaching skills actually bring about changes in the cognitive processes and instructional behaviours of the beginning teachers and

thereby enhance pupil learning remains to be considered in future research, however.

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Table 1

Mean SCS Scores from Expert Raters and Results of *t*-Tests for Differences in Pretest and Posttest Scores and Differences in Gain Scores for Trained and Untrained Mentors

Scale for Coaching Skills (SCS)	Trained group (n = 15)		Untrained group (n = 7)		Pre-post gain		
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Trained group	Untrained group	t
	M	*M*	*M*	*M*	*M*	*M*	
SCS total (32 items, α = .97)	2.0	3.8**	1.9	2.2*	1.8	0.2	6.1**
Developing autonomy (14 items, α = .96)	1.9	3.7**	2.0	2.2	1.8	0.2	6.1**
Feedback (7 items, α = .97)	1.4	3.5**	1.7	2.1	2.1	0.5	2.8**
Encouragement of self-reflection (8 items, α = .92)	1.9	3.7**	1.7	1.7	1.7	0.0	6.6**
Business-like attitude (3 items, α = .78)	4.0	4.9**	3.1	3.4	0.9	0.3	1.5

Note: The Mean SCS scores are based on a five-point scale: 1 = no application of the skill, 5 = clear application of the skill.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 2

Mean TSCS Scores from Coached Beginning Teachers and Results of *t*-Tests for Differences in Pretest and Posttest Scores and Differences in Gain Scores for Trained and Untrained Mentors

Teacher Scale for Coaching Skills (TSCS)	Trained group (n = 15)		Untrained group (n = 7)		Pre-post gain		
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Trained group	Untrained group	t
	M	*M*	*M*	*M*	*M*	*M*	
TSCS total (32 items, α = .96)	3.9	4.3**	3.4	4.1*	0.4	0.7	0.9
Making concrete improvement plans (12 items, α = .91)	3.6	4.1**	3.0	3.8*	0.6	0.8	0.7
Improvement of instruction through self-reflection (7 items, α = .89)	3.4	3.9**	2.8	3.8*	0.5	1.0	1.2
Empathic stimulation to improve instruction (7 items, α = .91)	3.8	4.2*	2.7	3.9*	0.5	1.2	1.7
Appreciation of mentor's coaching skills (6 items, α = .81)	3.8	4.2**	3.2	3.9	0.4	0.7	0.9
Mentor's use of observational data [1] (7 items, α = .77)	-	4.4	-	4.2			1.0

Note: [1] The subscale "Mentor's use of observational data" was only used at posttest. The Mean TSCS scores are based on a five-point scale: 1 = no application of the skill, 5 = clear application of the skill. The TSCS total is based on the first four subscales.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$